

**SCIENCE MISSION DIRECTORATE POLICY**  
**REQUESTING RECONSIDERATION OF NRA PROPOSAL DECLINATION**  
**SMD POLICY DOCUMENT 09 (SPD-09B)**

Originally approved by SMD Science Management Council on September 18, 2006  
Revised version approved by the SMD Associate Administrator September 25, 2013  
Responsible Official: SMD Lead for Research.

Purpose

This document describes the SMD process for requesting reconsideration following the declination of a proposal submitted in response to an SMD NASA Research Announcement. Reconsideration may be requested if the PI believes that the proposal was not handled correctly. Only the SMD process is described here; proposers will be informed of the availability of the Ombudsman review process in the Guidebook for Proposers Responding to a NASA Research Announcement (NRA) and in all future SMD NRAs.

Section 1: Notification of Declination of Proposals

Program Officers are responsible for providing a written explanation of the basis for a decision to decline a proposal; this written explanation satisfies the requirements of NASA FAR Supplement §[1852.235-72](#)(k)(1) "When a proposal is not selected for award, the proposer will be notified. NASA will explain generally why the proposal was not selected. Proposers desiring additional information may contact the selecting official who will arrange a debriefing." This document lays out the process for that debriefing.

(a) Program Officers must provide a written evaluation of the proposal that includes the findings that formed the basis for the decision to select or decline a proposal.

(b) The following language, or similar language adapted for the individual circumstances of each competition and decision process, must be included in the decision letter sent to the PI along with the written evaluation.

The proposals were peer reviewed by qualified, unconflicted peer reviewers appointed by NASA based on the evaluation criteria stated in the NRA. The selections were based on primarily on the grades given by peer review, but in some cases programmatic considerations were considered in distinguishing between proposals in the selectable range. Please find enclosed the written evaluation of your proposal. We hope this information is helpful to you in understanding the perceived strengths and weaknesses of your proposal. If you have any questions about this review, please contact me via email at [myname@nasa.gov](mailto:myname@nasa.gov) or by telephone at 202-358-XXXX.

In addition, extra information may be included

- (i) The scientific merit of this proposal was evaluated to be insufficient to make it competitive for selection; and/or

- (ii) The relevance of this proposal was evaluated to be insufficient to make it competitive for selection; and/or
- (iii) The scientific merit of this proposal was evaluated to be competitive for selection, but there was insufficient funding to support it once other higher priority proposals had been selected. Prioritization within the competitive range was based on .....(e.g., the degree to which proposals offered direct benefit to NASA future mission planning).

## Section 2: General Policies Regarding the Reconsideration of Proposals

A Program Officer must be responsive to a Principal Investigator (PI) who requests a debriefing, following the decision and receipt of the written evaluation. Prior to both the official decision by the Selecting Official and receipt of the written evaluation, the Program officer should not respond to a reconsideration request e.g., based on any preliminary assessment, other than to say that they got it and will respond after the decision has been made and the written evaluation has been provided. The clock can't start until after both of those events have occurred.

(a) Before initiating a formal request for reconsideration, a PI who is not satisfied with the explanation of the basis for the declination in the written evaluation (typically the panel evaluation) of his/her proposal must contact the Program Officer regarding his/her reasons for requesting reconsideration of the declination. These reasons should be detailed in an email to the Program Officer, especially if these reasons involve perceived technical errors in the findings of fact in the written evaluation.

(b) The Program Officer should provide a response as soon as possible, generally within four weeks of the request. If additional time is required to prepare a response, then the need for more time should be communicated to the PI as soon as possible, certainly within four weeks of the request.

(c) Following the response from the Program Officer, a PI who is still not satisfied that the review on which the decision was based was fair and reasonable, substantively and/or procedurally may formally request reconsideration of that decision from the Selecting Official (i.e., the Division Director or designee).

(d) PIs should be informed that, because factors such as program budget and priorities factor into the decision process, reconsideration will not necessarily result in an award, even if it is established that there was an error in the review.

(e) PIs should also be informed that reconsideration will be based on the material in the original proposal. Requests for reconsideration based on results obtained after the proposal was submitted, for instance, are not appropriate.

(f) PIs should also be informed that the reconsideration will focus on the fairness and quality of the review, not settling disagreements over scientific or technical issues.

### Section 3: Process for Handling a Request for Reconsideration

#### (a) Request for Reconsideration

(i) If unsatisfied with the Program Officer's response (Section 2(b)), the PI may then submit a Request for Reconsideration to the Selecting Official. This Request should summarize the reasons for the Request for Reconsideration and must be made in writing within 60 calendar days of receipt of the declination letter, or within 30 days of the Program Officer's written response, whichever is later. The Program Officer should be copied on the Request for Reconsideration.

(ii) The Selecting Official must respond in writing to the Request for Reconsideration within 30 calendar days. If additional time is required to prepare a response, then the need for more time should be communicated to the PI as soon as possible, certainly before the end of the 30 calendar days. The written response from the Selecting Official is not expected to assess the technical details of the evaluation, but should address issues raised in the Request for Reconsideration relating to the review process, such as fairness, potential bias or conflicts of interest, and whether the reviewers were technically qualified. The Program Officer must be copied on the response of the Selecting Official.

#### (b) Appeal to the Science Mission Directorate Associate Administrator (AA).

(i) If the PI is not satisfied with the Selecting Official's written response then he/she may submit an appeal to the Associate Administrator. The AA may choose to delegate this role (e.g., to the DAA or Lead for Research). This Appeal, which should summarize the reasons for the Appeal must be made in writing within 30 calendar days of receipt of the Selecting Official's response. The Program Officer and Selecting Official should be copied on this appeal.

(ii) The Associate Administrator must respond in writing to this Appeal within 30 calendar days. If additional time is required to prepare a response, then the need for more time should be communicated to the PI as soon as possible, certainly before the end of the 30 calendar days. The Selecting Official and Program Officer must be copied on the response.

#### (c) Further Appeals

If the response from the representative of the Associate Administrator is not satisfactory, the PI (or offeror) may consult the Ombudsman review process in the Guidebook for Proposers.

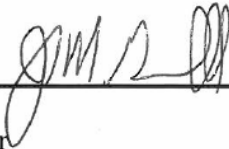
### Section 4: Record Keeping

(a) Upon receipt of a written Request for Reconsideration, the Program Officer shall create a file containing the records of the reconsideration. These records must include all written requests from the PI and all written responses from the Science Mission Directorate.

(b) The written records associated with a Request for Reconsideration must be maintained for one year, or until any appeals and other determinations concerning the

decision for proposal declination are completed, whichever is longer. This includes appeals and determinations both within the Science Mission Directorate and external to the Science Mission Directorate.

Approved:

  
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John M. Grunsfeld  
Associate Administrator  
for the Science Mission Directorate

25 SEP 2013

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Date